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S E C R E T JAKARTA 000711

NSC FOR KAREN BROOKS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/26/2014
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [ID](#)
SUBJECT: YUDHOYONO: A MAN FOR ALL PARTIES

REF: A. JAKARTA 76
[1](#)B. 03 JAKARTA 8778

(U) Classified by Political Officer David R. Greenberg,
reason 1.4 (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) Coordinating Minister for Political and Security Affairs Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono has stated openly his intention to run for the presidency in 2004. He has not yet declared allegiance to any particular political party, however, and, consequently, is both widely courted and criticized as indecisive. Yudhoyono's many options illustrate his broad appeal and potential to become the consensus candidate of a broad but not-yet-extant coalition. If he fails to make the right choice at the right time, however, he may wind up with little or no chance to win high office. End Summary.

THE WAITING GAME

[1](#)2. (C) Yudhoyono, who competed in 2001's People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) election for the vice presidency as the Muslim Sovereignty Union (PDU) nominee, long has appeared as a potential presidential candidate for 2004. He directed the creation of the Democratic Party (PD) in 2002, although refusing to take a party position or to encourage publicly the perception that he would be PD's presidential nominee. As the 2004 elections approached, other parties began to consider Yudhoyono a potential standard-bearer. Credible polls enhanced his appeal, as he rose in popularity throughout 2003, often placing second only to President Megawati. In early January 2004, press articles quoted Yudhoyono saying he intended to run for the presidency and, accordingly, would resign from the cabinet when parties must nominate their candidates (early May 2004). He declined to identify his political party of choice, however.

THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY (PD): THE BIRD IN THE HAND

[1](#)3. (C) PD is a newcomer to the political scene and is widely seen as Yudhoyono's political machine; Yudhoyono's image graces the business card of party Chairman Budhisantoso as well as banners and stickers throughout the party headquarters. Yudhoyono himself designed the party logo and drafted the by-laws. In founding PD, Yudhoyono reportedly had the encouragement of 100 appointed members of the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) and many local officials in conflict areas, such as Aceh and Papua. Budhisantoso claimed PD has issued six million membership cards, although he admitted that he was uncertain of winning that many votes and twice mentioned to us he and the party suffered from a lack of funds. PD has no distinctive ideological appeal and is reportedly hurt by weak organization. Most of our

contacts from other political parties readily dismiss PD's prospects of passing the threshold required to nominate a presidential candidate. (Note: the threshold is three percent of the seats in the House of Representative or five percent of the popular vote. End Note.)

THE NATIONAL AWAKENING PARTY (PKB)

14. (C) Some of Yudhoyono's advisors tell us the Coordinating Minister recognizes PD's weaknesses and is holding out for the nomination of one of Indonesia's larger parties. The party of choice, according to TB "Benny" Silalahi, a former Minister of State for Administrative Reform and now a member of Yudhoyono's campaign team, is the National Awakening Party (PKB). In this scenario, former President (and PKB overlord) Abdurrachman Wahid, realizing that he cannot campaign credibly after his 2001 impeachment, decides to support Yudhoyono. Several PKB contacts close to Wahid, including his daughter Yenny, have told us Yudhoyono is the figure most likely to gain Wahid's support if Wahid decides to withdraw -- a development no one guarantees. According to Silalahi, 20 of PKB's 30 provincial boards were supportive of a Yudhoyono nomination, with the remaining 10 likely soon to fall in line. Silalahi claimed one main stumbling block for Yudhoyono was Wahid's high price for shifting roles from candidate to kingmaker. Wahid reportedly wanted Yudhoyono to choose a PKB running mate and reserve half of his cabinet positions for PKB.

PD: WE CAN SHARE, BUT WE DON'T LIKE RADICALS

15. (C) Noting that his main goal was to promote Yudhoyono's election, PD Chairman Budhisantoso told us he saw PKB more as a potential partner than as a rival for Yudhoyono's attention. He said he had received positive signals from various factions within PKB and hoped to meet soon with former President Wahid. He asserted that "hundreds" of Ulama (senior Islamic figures) had expressed their support for Yudhoyono's candidacy. Other Islamic parties aside from PKB also appear to view Yudhoyono positively; National Mandate Party (PAN) Chairman Amien Rais publicly named Yudhoyono as a possible running mate, and even officials of the staunchly Islamist Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) have suggested that they could support Yudhoyono. But Budhisantoso was cool to an alliance of Islamic parties coalescing behind Yudhoyono; he warned that radical Islamists were the main enemies of Indonesia as a unitary state, and they would be difficult to control if Yudhoyono depended on their support.

GOLKAR

16. (C) Golkar party Chairman Akbar Tandjung in February 2003 raised the possibility of Yudhoyono becoming Golkar's presidential nominee, when he provided the media with a short list that included the Coordinating Minister. Yudhoyono did not register for Golkar's presidential convention process, however, and several Golkar Vice Chairmen have privately dismissed the idea of their party choosing Yudhoyono over other high-profile figures who have been courting Golkar's provincial, city, and regency boards for the past eight months. Nevertheless, both Silalahi and Yudhoyono advisor Denny J.A. separately told us that, because of Yudhoyono's popularity, Akbar Tandjung had indicated a willingness to let Yudhoyono head Golkar's ticket, with Akbar as his running mate. They added that Akbar might also continue to pursue his own presidential campaign and offer Yudhoyono the vice presidency.

17. (C) Budhisantoso confided that potential Golkar presidential nominee Wiranto had dispatched a retired four-star General with a message that Yudhoyono should not run in the 2004 election. Budhisantoso said this message was not intended as a threat. He noted Yudhoyono felt no particular loyalty to Wiranto, citing Wiranto's once having

blocked Yudhoyono from assuming a military command in Sumatra. Budhisantoso also said Yudhoyono had no reason to fear Wiranto, as Wiranto, when accused of human rights violations in East Timor, had sought "protection" from Yudhoyono in his capacity as Coordinating Minister.

PDI-P

18. (S) Yudhoyono also has drawn the attention of leading Indonesian Democratic Party - Struggle (PDI-P) figures dissatisfied with Megawati's leadership. Vice Chairmen Arifin Panigoro and Roy Janis -- both lead significant factions of PDI-P -- have told us of their interest in supporting Yudhoyono instead of Megawati (ref A). According to Denny JA, Yudhoyono also has the support of some senior-generation nationalists within PDI-P, such as parliamentarian Abdul Madjid. And Budhisantoso said grassroots-level PDI-P party cadres were seeking to defect to PD, specifically mentioning a group of 3,000 in Lampung province. Budhisantoso said he was wary of taking in sympathizers from other parties because, at this stage, Yudhoyono did not want to antagonize other political leaders.

A RUNNING MATE

9.(C) Many presidential hopefuls have considered tapping Yudhoyono as their vice-presidential running mate, drawn by his ethical image, intellectual prowess, military background, Javanese ethnicity -- and, perhaps most importantly, his reputation for loyalty. Silalahi said Yudhoyono had told him that Megawati had offered him the vice presidency, but he was reluctant to accept. First, he did not respect Megawati, due to her lack of education and vision, plus her husband's corruption. Second, he feared a recurrence of the 1999 "Anyone But Mega" dynamic, which might drag him down along with the President. PD Chairman Budhisantoso also told us Yudhoyono had long assured his advisors that he would not settle for the Vice Presidency. If his ambitions were limited to the number two position, Budhisantoso pointed out, why go through all the effort required to build his own party?

COMMENT

10. (C) Many Indonesians consider Yudhoyono indecisive and interpret his failure to date to announce his presidential candidacy as a further indicator of his cautious temperament.

Nevertheless, we believe Yudhoyono has played his cards well. The Democratic Party offers him a fallback option and a degree of bargaining leverage as he waits for a larger party's nomination. PD should easily go along with any arrangement that would boost Yudhoyono's prospects, even if it means another party takes the lead. Delaying the announcement of his candidacy makes it easier for Yudhoyono to remain in place as Coordinating Minister, a position that offers him constant and generally positive media exposure. He likely recalls that Islamic intellectual Nurcholish Madjid received a burst of coverage when first announcing his candidacy but has been largely dismissed after his clumsy entry into and then withdrawal from Golkar's process (ref B).

11. (C) Yudhoyono's many options reflect his positive image in the eyes of top politicians. His personal popularity implies that his impact in the presidential race, assuming he can secure nomination by a qualifying party or coalition, would exceed the vote tallies garnered by his political vehicle in the legislative election. So long as matters in political parties appear unsettled or open to change, Yudhoyono will keep popping up on candidate short lists. However, as the pieces of the various puzzles fall into place, Yudhoyono will find avenues closing off, and he will have to show he can act decisively, or he might find rival candidates have locked up large constituencies. But a few deft moves, combined with some lucky breaks, could allow Yudhoyono to pull together key social and political groups in support of a powerful presidential run.

